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Contact: Anna Mary Mackey

Office: (520) 318-6907

E-mail: annamary.mackey@cpsa-rbha.org

CPSA schedules Mental Health First Aid trainings in response to shooting tragedy

As Arizona continues to react and respond to the January 8 mass shooting in Tucson, communities across the state have focused their attention on mental health. Much speculation has focused on the portrayed mental state of the gunman and what interventions could have potentially prevented this tragedy.

In response to this public discussion and request for education, Community Partnership of Southern Arizona (CPSA) has partnered with the Arizona Department of Health Services/Division of Behavioral Health Services (ADHS/DBHS) and the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (National Council) to launch a statewide, extensive training campaign in Mental Health First Aid.

"People in our community want to take positive action after this tragedy," said Neal Cash, President and CEO of CPSA. "Learning more about mental health and how to recognize and respond to possible problems is one way of doing that, one that could be of long term benefit to everyone in our community."

Mental Health First Aid is a novel, evidence-based public education program. The program teaches average people a five-step process to assess a situation, select and implement appropriate interventions, and help a person in crisis or who may be developing the signs and symptoms of mental illness. The groundbreaking training equips people to provide initial help until appropriate professional, peer or family support can be engaged. Participants also learn about risk factors and warning signs of specific illnesses such as anxiety, depression, psychosis and addiction.

"None of us should underestimate the importance of early identification and intervention with an emerging mental health or substance abuse problem," said Laura Nelson, M.D., Deputy Director at ADHS/DBHS. "Just as with diabetes or high blood pressure, the earlier the problem is recognized and addressed, the better the outcomes can be. It is also true that people who know the individual best can recognize the early signs and symptoms and can help that person get the treatment and support they may need."

CPSA has been involved with Mental Health First Aid since 2009 and is now working to expand program offerings in the state.

CPSA will host an Instructor Training, conducted by the National Council, to increase the number of certified instructors who can offer the program throughout Arizona. The Instructor Training takes place the week of February 28-March 4, 2011. CPSA and the other Tribal and Regional Behavioral Health Authorities from around the state will identify thirty (30) future instructors to participate in this event.

The National Council has worked closely with CPSA and ADHS/DBHS to quickly mobilize its nationwide resources to support the Arizona trainings.

"People in the family or community often don't connect a person with mental illness to care because they don't know how," said Linda Rosenberg, President and CEO of the National

Council. “Mental Health First Aid teaches people how to offer concrete help. This early intervention can prevent tragic consequences and save lives.”

CPSA will offer a Mental Health First Aid training in early March for organizations and individuals most affected by the events of January 8. CPSA and the National Council will provide instructors for these sessions.

CPSA also will schedule trainings that will be open to the general public. For information, see the CPSA Web site at www.cpsa-rbha.org, call (520) 618-8860 or e-mail Prevention@cpsa-rbha.org.

CPSA, founded and based in Tucson, has overseen publicly funded behavioral health services in Pima County since 1995 and currently serves close to 30,000 members. CPSA receives funding from ADHS/DBHS, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Resources for mental health and trauma issues following the January 8 shootings

- **Tucson Tragedy Support Line: (520) 284-3517**, available at no cost to anyone in Pima County who is struggling to deal with these events, or who wants information on how to help themselves or others cope. Staff at this number also will provide referrals to community behavioral healthcare providers and other services such as help coping with trauma and help talking with children and teens about tragedy.
- **CPSA Web site** (www.cpsa-rbha.org), including links to information from trusted sources on how to talk with children and teens about a tragedy, self-care in the wake of trauma and related topics.
- **Community-Wide Crisis Line: (520) 520-622-6000 or 1-800-796-6762**. Available 24/7 for anyone having a behavioral health crisis. Hearing impaired individuals may call the Crisis TTY Line at 520-284-3500 or 1-888-248-5998.
- **Walk-in behavioral health crisis services: SAMHC, 2502 N. Dodge Blvd.** (enter from Flower Street, which is parallel with and just north of Grant Road). If possible, please call the Community-Wide Crisis Line before going to SAMHC.

ADHS/DBHS and Magellan Health Services of Arizona have established a hotline for people **outside of Pima County** who need help in dealing with this tragedy: 1-800-203-CARES (1-800-203-2273).

An additional resource for people who are concerned about their own or someone else's mental health is the “**Mental Health Checklist**” on ADHS/DBHS' Web site, www.azdhs.gov/bhs/.